

**Oral History Interview with  
Howard and Dorothea Hawkins**

**Cal Poly Pomona University Library**

## **Howard and Dorothea Hawkins Summary**

In 1938, Howard and Dorothea Hawkins moved to the newly opened Cal Poly Voorhis campus in San Dimas, California. Howard had been a faculty member in the Agriculture department at the main Cal Poly campus in San Luis Obispo and was transferred to Voorhis. The Voorhis campus was the former site of the Voorhis School for Boys and had been donated to the state by its founder Charles Voorhis. The California Polytechnic College, more commonly known as “Cal Poly,” decided to use the campus as its southern satellite. The Voorhis campus would eventually become Cal Poly Pomona. The Hawkins describe what it was like to live on campus with their young children and recall the other staff and students at Voorhis. Howard also recalls his work as an agricultural inspector. The Hawkins recorded themselves answering questions mailed to them by Kenneth Kitch.

### **Subject Headings**

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona  
Citrus fruit industry  
Fruit—Grading

### Legal Statement

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement between Cal Poly Pomona and the interviewee. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All library rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to the Cal Poly Pomona Library.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Cal Poly Pomona Library and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of passages, and identification of the user.

## Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
The Voorhis Campus	1
Orchards and Student Workers	3
Families Living on Campus	4
Surrounding Communities	5
Pearl Harbor	7
Students	9
Ditch Day	10
Instruction and Field Trips	11
Working as an Inspector	13

## Howard and Dorothea Hawkins

September 1972

*Interview Conducted by Kenneth Kitch  
Transcribed by Iman Mirza*

**HH:** It was in the fall of 1938, where three of the staff members from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo were [given] a four-weeks' notice that we were to move to San Dimas from San Luis Obispo, and start at the school for the new fall term.

I think we arrived in San Dimas, perhaps last week in August to the first week in September. We're supposed to be ready to start school by the third week in September.

There was Vernon Meacham who had taught at Cal Poly ever since 1933 when Mr. [Julian] McPhee took it over. He had been teaching in Dairy and AG [Agricultural] Mechanics at San Luis Obispo.

There was [inaudible], who was in charge of the Agricultural Inspection department. It was thought that Agricultural Inspection would be one of the big fields on this new campus in Southern California.

And myself, Howard Hawkins, was moved down because of my background in Citrus. So, when we arrived in the first of September, or shortly thereafter, our first job was to physically get the campus ready to have students. Mr. [Jerry] Voorhis has not had the school operating as a school for a couple of years because he'd been off to Congress. His father [Charles Voorhis] was getting long in years and couldn't handle a job of taking care of these orphaned and somewhat underprivileged boys that Jerry had been working with.

The dormitories were there and in the scheme of things under the Voorhis' the dorms each had room for three or four boys and a housemother in each one. They were named after members of the family, like Aunt Nel was Mrs. Voorhis [Ella], Sr. Rose Cottage was just named because it was next to the rose garden and Charlie's was Uncle Charlie and so forth. These had been set up for real young kids, so we had to get the facilities out and make them available for college-aged kids, young people.

We physically spent a lot of time cleaning up the dorms and we started to determine what courses we would teach in this first year. Mr. [inaudible] had been teaching Agricultural Inspection at San Luis Obispo so he could just lift his subject matter and bring it down and start from there. At San Luis Obispo, I had been teaching Poultry and General Science so I had to rapidly develop a Citrus course and Soils, and to get ready for the fall.

Vernon Meacham had been teaching, like I said, Agricultural Mechanics and other subjects and he was put in charge of the school. He taught Mathematics and some of our beginning courses of a general nature.

**HH:** There were three of us teachers from San Luis Obispo that were to be part of the teaching staff and then there were two cadet teachers that year that were assigned down here; one of which was [William “Bill”] Troutner, who is now teaching at San Luis Obispo and probably about ready for retirement.

We had another practice teacher that year that helped Mr. [inaudible] in Inspection and I can’t remember his name at this moment. Then there were two men left over from the original campus that Jerry Voorhis had operated, named Mr. Heber Clewett, who was a real brain but not too good at getting along with college-aged boys. He was strict and tried to treat them like he had treated the young kids that were living there when Jerry Voorhis was there. This didn’t go very well with college-aged kids at this time.

Many of our students that first year were a little bit older; they’d been out working for a year or two and decided they need some more education and had decided to come back to school for that purpose. Among those students were people like Tom Plum, who now is in Imperial Valley; Herman Sperber, who was in that first-year class; and some others who later on became involved with Poly in other ways.

Many of these students were almost as old as I was at that time, and we even had a few students that were older. There was one man about 45 or 50 that we call “Pop Sniffin” and he came there for the first year or so. So, these students couldn’t be treated like they were kids but had to be treated like young men. Mr. Clewett had trouble doing that. He taught the subjects—he taught Math and a Physics course, and some general subjects like that.

Then there was another man left over from the Voorhis regime, Bob Balch. He was a maintenance man and taught shop. We had a shop course and he taught some woodshop and some metal shop and knew where the gas lines and water lines were, and so forth. This was a real problem to us, who were new there, to find out just where to turn on what when we first began.

These were the things that we had to learn quickly as we started school. I think our enrollment that first year came up to about 90 students. We had three of us, the two practice teachers were five, Mr. Clewett and Mr. Balch. That was our staff at that time.

We got along real well. Everybody was anxious to do well in the first year, so besides teaching classes, everybody had to double in brass and do something else. Only athletics we had the first year was baseball. Vernon Meacham coached the baseball [team]. We didn’t have a field to speak of, it had been allowed to go to gophers and weeds for a long period of years. So, it took a while to bring it back. That was our only competitive athletics sport.

I had to act as student store manager because there were—we had to have a student store to sell the books and the supplies, and we had a pool table leftover from the Voorhis [School for Boys]; it was our only recreation facility there. This was an extra-curricular activity. In those early days, all the [Cal] Poly people didn’t mind working long hours and extra hours because we just thought it was expected of us at that time. There was no such thing as finishing your teacher-load and disappearing from the campus because you were on duty all the time.

**HH:** One of my side jobs was to take care of the orchards; see if they were good, see that they were cultivated when necessary. There was a broken-down tractor on the campus, halfway broken-down spray rigs that we used for spraying the trees, and the first year we also insisted that everybody in the Citrus class do the picking of the navels [oranges]. We probably had a crop of around 1500 boxes of navels [oranges] on the grove there, so different labs picked navels [oranges] and I remember quite distinctly that five cents a box was a rate of pay we gave the students at that time. Also working on campus at that time was worth 30 cents an hour. That was agricultural work, and that was considered fairly good because farmers in the area were paying their full-time adult help 25 cents an hour.

Bill Leech [William Clifton “Bill” Leech], who is now a stockbroker in Covina, was foreman of the [inaudible] ranch company. He confessed to me a couple of times because we were paying too much money for the students in comparison to the two bits an hour that he was paying for the full-time labor.

One of the things that we ran into right away was the fact that the campus being deserted for a while; it had lots of varmints on it. On a moonlit night, you could come out and walk from the administrative building down to the end of the campus. I live down by the hospital and count as many as 10 or 15 tarantulas walking across the lawn. They lived in the canyons and came up to the lawn to get drinks at night. People that know tarantulas know they won’t hurt you, but they were gruesome to look at when they may be as big as a small dinner plate, walking across the lawn on a bright moonlit night.

We also used to have literally hundreds of rabbits that came out of the canyons and ate the grass at night. See, we arrived in September, so all the canyons were dry, so these animals came out. Up and down that canyon, there was a family of deer, buck and two does and some fawns that we’d see. Quite often, they lived between the Voorhis unit and up toward where Puddingstone Dam outlet is. They lived in the canyon there because there was water running all year, and they were able to get a drink. Coyotes could be heard many times at night, especially in the wintertime you could hear the coyotes howling at a distance. I suppose they were looking for the rabbits that were up eating on the lawn. It was really quite a rural area when we arrived, and some of the first-year students that we had, who had come out of the city of Los Angeles or Long Beach or places that were pretty metropolitan, really enjoyed the rural atmosphere there. We had a really good educational year that first year based on the fact that everybody was working and everybody was trying hard.

**HH:** Okay, now go ahead.

**DH:** When we first came down to Cal Poly... [PAUSE] Well, go on. I can’t think. I can’t talk when you’re—that’s why I didn’t come on.

**HH:** That’s why we’re recording.

**DH:** Yeah

[Inaudible voices in the background]

**DH:** We had just gotten a new place in San Luis Obispo when Julian McPhee came over and asked us how we would like to go down to the Voorhis unit at the California Polytechnic to teach. After he talked to us for a while, we were very excited, and we left and were the first family on the campus. We stayed in one of the boys' dorms until our house had been made ready for us. The next family to come down was the Vernon Macchams. Already on the campus, the Voorhis [Mr. and Mrs. Jerry?] were there with their three children. The Balches were there with their boy and the Clewetts had two boys.

When we arrived with our two girls, who have birthdays on the 21st and the 29th of September, and the two Meacham boys had birthdays on the 23rd and the 27th of September. And so we arrived with four children, eager to celebrate their birthdays at a brand new place. We couldn't disappoint our boys and girls until we had one large party - and invited all the boys and girls around the campus and those that we already knew in San Dimas and Covina and had one grand party for the four members of the Hawkins-Meacham family.

Our two girls and the other young people of the campus there really had good times. The boys were very nice to them; they were the pets of all the dorms. They had the nice places to play and the ravines. They built a house down in one ravine that was all theirs and they roamed the campus. They went swimming in the nice weather in the pool.

Our girls were very, very tiny. Pat was 6 and Jacqueline was almost 4, and they were excellent swimmers and divers because we had the indoor pool at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. When they first came and would run out on the edge of the diving board, all the students would be quite excited and some would dive in to rescue them and they would swim like little fishes.

We had a daughter born on the campus at Voorhis, which was a thrilling and exciting event for all of us. And on Friday nights... [chuckles] there weren't many automobiles in those days and the boys didn't have too much money. So on Friday nights, they'd come down to see if we'd take them to the show and we ran quite a taxi service; mainly to Pomona, down the winding hill, and we would pack our car doors, doors seemed as if they would burst. Fill them with students and take them down and drop them off and go home for another load, and then we'd begin the return trip to bring them all home again.

The dances and the affairs that we had on campus, of course, were well attended by all the students that were more like a large, happy family. Their parents would come to visit them and their girlfriends, and our house was always full with family and friends of the students.

We had the very first Poly Vue there 30 years ago. What an exciting time, we had a lot of fun and a lot of work, but [it was] very worthwhile and the parents were so thrilled. That's 30 years ago. We still hear from many, many of the young men and their families and they're now grown in their families. We thoroughly enjoyed every minute of our stay at [Cal] Poly. When the war years came and the V-12 program came in, and the boys were sent to San Luis Obispo, we had a mighty, lonely campus.



[LONG PAUSE]

**HH:** We were welcomed by the San Dimas community because they felt that with the school being absent for so long, there was an opportunity for economic aid to the community by the students coming in. Remember, this was 1938 so the economic level in San Dimas was pretty low at that point; depending almost completely on citrus and citrus had been in [inaudible] for several years. So, we were well received by the San Dimas Chamber of Commerce and they had a dinner with us down there and we, as individual families, were well received by all of the community.

The students were also liked because they were adults and mature, and probably spent more money than the Voorhis' younger kids [students at the Voorhis School for Boys] had when they were the ones that were around that area. I remember, almost everybody had some kind of transportation because being out in the country that way, there was no public transportation; they had to be able to get to the campus and back. Many of the cars were of antique vintage and many were various degrees of runnability, and every once in a while, we'll get a telephone call for help from somebody [someone's car] that have been broken down; down at the bottom of the hill or down at San Dimas, and want to get a ride back up on the campus.

With that winding road and that big oak tree down at the bottom, in all the years from 1938 till the war closed the place in 1944, there was never an accident on that road. A narrow, twisting road and the boys coming home at all hours of the night in various conditions was certainly amazing. One boy did run into the oak tree at the bottom of the hill there, coming toward the campus so therefore, approaching the bottom of the canyon there's a large oak tree on the left. He was a one-armed fella and taking landscape architecture.

He was with another student and they each claimed the other was driving. So how they hit the tree and no one was hurt, was more than anybody could understand. But that was the only recorded accident in all those years on that crooked road, which was something of a record in itself.

I figured at one time, that 80% of our students that first couple of years were doing some work to put themselves through school. Almost nobody had enough money to do the job completely. Some got some help from home, some got no help; working on the campus, working on the grounds and in the orchard was considered very desirable because like I said before, it paid only 30 cents an hour.

It was work. And if the records show that our first-year's charges there was \$25 a month for board and room. For board, I'm sorry, for board. And \$5 a month for room. Now, there was only one meal on Sunday. There were three meals through six days and one meal on Sunday, which was lunchtime. So, many of the boys—most of the boys went home for the weekend; only those that had to stay on campus for their jobs were there usually during the weekend.

Also, during the wintertime, we got many calls for boys to do smudging work, orchard heating. I had quite a scheduled crew of people that would be called out for smudging. Each dormitory or hall had one phone, and so if an orchard man needed help and that student was living there, well

then he would have to call that number and whoever answered the phone had to get that particular individual up and get him out on a smudging job.

**HH:** Fall of '38, spring of '39 were just medium-cold years, so there was some employment but not a lot, based on orchard heating. Some of the boys got jobs in town doing different things in both San Dimas and Covina. The energetic ones got out and got yard work to do and various kinds; some even did window-washing and jobs like that. It was a direct ratio between their ambition and energy to work in their ability to get out and find a job, because again, this is fall of '38 and jobs were not plentiful.

**DH:** Talking about leaving the campus reminds me of our dog. We had a great, big red Chow whom we named General Trouble. He had a girlfriend who was a Great Dane and he was always in trouble with this Great Dane; he'd come home completely mutilated.

But the funny thing that happened on campus was, word quickly spread that the students had been sent to San Luis Obispo, so everyone wanted this beautiful campus for their own use. Somehow, the army thought they had the inside tracked. One day, this very large beribboned, bedecked General appeared at my door and demanded to see the house because he said this is where he and his wife were to be quartered. Whereupon General Trouble rose up and chased him out to his waiting Sergeant automobile, but not before he'd taken a good size chunk of his uniform right out of his seat. From then on, we were grateful and fond of General Trouble.

I did say that we had the first Poly Vue 30 years ago, but I don't think that I mentioned that our two daughters were 11 months apart. We're asked by the students to crown the queen; the boys designed their dresses and I had them made just as they wanted them to appear. They ordered a crown of flowers for each girl's head. DH: They had—one girl was blond and one girl was a brunette, but they wore their hair in curls. They were very thrilled as were their parents to crown the first Poly Queen.

Our life on the campus was very, very nice. We were a close-knit group; most of our friends were from San Dimas. We had a book club. We had a bridge club. We went to the community church there. Our youngest daughter went to kindergarten, but our next daughter went to the first grade in Covina. Both girls eventually went to the Covina school system. It was a little difficult, as the girls grew older, to have friends. It was a little out of the way and many, many mothers would not drive up the one winding hill to get to the campus. As the girls approached high school and were beginning to have dates, my mother lived in Covina, so many times the girls would meet their friends there at her home; because boys, of course at that age, were not driving cars so they would walk to a fair from my mother's home.

This, I think, was one reason when we finally did move into town that we did move into a city proper of Covina. As a family, we knew the many advantages of moving out and we also knew that there were some things that were a little more difficult when you did live that far away from a town for your growing family. Of course, you always had to have staples on hand because you couldn't run to the stores. You can when you live a little closer.

**DH:** Think I'm starting to go backwards on this thing, but I remembered this to be a particularly happy time but it's difficult to remember events and sequence. When we first went on the campus, we had more wildlife. It was not uncommon to see a family of skunks walk across the campus. We did see an occasional wild coyote (?) and of course we heard the coyotes every night. Our family were not at all afraid of tarantulas. In fact, we enjoyed them in their unique trap doors and we liked to watch them.

But some of our faculty members were in an absolute panic when they saw a tarantula. One faculty wife in particular, I remember, most of the members were gone but my husband was at the administration building and he heard this horrible screaming. It came out to find that she couldn't get to her car because there stood a tarantula between her home and her car; she just stood and screamed until help arrived.

I did have one frightening thing; we had those very, very long- I don't imagine that this is the correct term- snake lizards. I [was] vacuuming the drapes one day, one dropped on the top of my head and clung on for dear life. I was pretty panicky by the time I was able to get some dish cloth in my hand and pull him off of my hair, where he was clinging for fear of falling himself.

We did enjoy, in the evening, all getting together and taking walks to the top of the little [inaudible] there, at the top of the campus. In later years, due to the young people's enjoyment of the top of the hill, I guess it had to be chained off. We could no longer walk up there, but in the early days we loved to stroll up there in the nice spring and summer evenings.

**HH:** One of the things I remember most vividly is the—right after the war was declared in 1941, Pearl Harbor of course occurred on a Sunday. The next day, next morning at 8 o'clock, we had an assembly in the library at the Voorhis campus. This was 1941 and our campus was at its highest numbers at that time. We had about 220 enrolled in school; to have all these fellas packed in the library, plus the staff, secretaries and so forth was quite a job. In fact, they weren't all in the library; some of them were out on the patio right outside. But we turned on the radio, of course, and heard President Roosevelt's famous talk about a day of infamy.

The students were completely excited and ready to go right now and many of them, having established residence in the San Dimas area, were in the San Dimas draft board at that time. They also panicked and took several seniors who were within six months of graduation were told they were going to be drafted immediately if they didn't sign up.

One of them was Bob [unintelligible] or Robert [unintelligible], who now is a citizen in the San Dimas area. In fact, he's President of the School Board of the San Dimas school district. Being so close to graduation, it doesn't seem right in looking back that they were in such a panic that getting everybody into their uniform, but they did. Bob went into training, learned to fly, and was over in North Africa within about nine months flying B29s. He followed up North Africa with Europe and then came home prior to the Asian- to being moved to the Asian conflict. In fact, war ended about that time.

After the Declaration of War, it was harder to keep the students interested in agriculture and we followed the news—which was of course bad for several months—quite avidly. It was also

during this time that Los Angeles had the famous blackout, and supposedly enemy planes came over and reconnoitered the area. We stood out on a point down there by the hospital, looked out to the west and we could see the searchlights going up in the air on the - of course it was all black out - but they turned the searchlights on to try to search out the enemy planes. I never did hear whether there were any planes. I had always suspected that it was just an army maneuver that time to put Los Angeles on alert.

**HH:** As [for] the school, we had enough gasoline for the remainder of that year and the next year to take our normal field trips, but there wasn't very much for students and there was even less for faculty after the rationing books came out. Living up on the campus and having no stores around, the women took turns going downtown with their car and purchasing, and all the other wives would go along. Mrs. Fetters, Mrs. Meacham, Dorothea, and Mrs. [Stanton] Gray, who was there at that time, and Mrs. [W.E.] Court would load into one car and go down and do a week's shopping; come back with the automobile bulging.

We did other things in bulging automobiles too. I remember one night, the Meacham's who had five [members] in their family and we had four at that time, we all loaded in the Meacham's two-door Ford and went to Pomona to the show. It created quite a bit of consternation when we pulled up in front of the theatre down there and nine of us piled out of one two-door Ford sedan.

When we first moved down to Cal Poly, Weir Fetters was put in charge of the school. Vernon Meacham had been [here] much longer with Mr. [Julian] McPhee from 1933 to 1938. He had only been in San Luis [Obispo] for a couple of years, but he was in charge of the Inspection department - Agricultural Inspection - which had to do with training county inspectors for the Commissioner's office; shipping point inspections, various kinds of quarantine work on the border, and so forth.

Weir had made quite a splash so when we moved down with Mr. McPhee had him in charge. He had Vernon in there to sort of keep track of things, I think, as I look back on it. Weir was very ambitious and not very old yet. So, he wanted to make a big splash and he was very active in the San Dimas Service Club, which was not a regular service club connected with any organization but represented the total manpower of the community. He also ran around and made speeches to Commissioners' offices and so forth to tell about Cal Poly and what it was going to do. He was a good speaker, so he made many visits.

I think all this was pretty heady stuff because by the time spring came around and it was time for the first annual to be put out, they didn't get it at C.P. Voorhis, which was proper. But the big, full-page picture was of Weir Fetters and then later in the book was a quarter-and- half page picture of Mr. McPhee; that didn't go over very well. So, the following year, the following fall, the switch made Weir became a teacher and Vernon Meacham became in charge. There was a direct relationship I always felt between the annual and this particular thing that happened.

In the Citrus department, which is my responsibility, I also did lots of promoting and went around to the various packing houses and attended the packing house meetings, fruit exchange meetings, farm bureau meetings and kept promoting; talking up the school for citrus and to get new students to come. Having come from Placentia—doing high school teaching in Placentia—

about two years later, three or four of my former high school students came from Placentia to San Dimas and were very much interested in that work. Another big string of people came from Santa Paula, Ventura; not a big string but five or six would come out of that area. It seemed like if one student would come from an area, if he liked it, he'd go home and tell about it and send some more the following year.

**HH:** So, like I said earlier, we had 93 students the first year and about a hundred and... that would've been '38- '39; '39- '40 we must've had about 150. '40- '41 when we had 200. And then the fall of '41, at Pearl Harbor time, we were at our biggest something like 250, 260. The students were quite crowded at that time because we had originally rooms with two students in, now we put three in [each room]. Some of the bigger rooms have had three in, we had four in two double-bunk beds. This was probably unsatisfactory from a student's standpoint, but it couldn't beat our rates which were \$75 for room rent and \$25 for board and room.

So, we were, by that time, probably paying 40 cents an hour for student labor. We did as much labor as we could, probably as I remember back, two-thirds of students did some work somewhere; some worked off-campus. In citrus, in avocados, we tried to get the boys smudging jobs in the wintertime and quite a few did that. We tried to get them some ranch work in the summertime and some were able to do that. Some just got ordinary jobs like working in service stations in the same [places] that college kids do anywhere.

But it was a working student body. We had one young man that came from Austria, Fred [Diebold?] and he came from wealthy people. He had relatives in Beverly Hills, and he came out to school. But he lived like the rest of the kids and he took Citrus.

I remember that first time we were picking navels [oranges] the first winter, we'd pick around as much as we're entitled to; say three or four hundred boxes would be our turn out of the grove. And then the packing house would pay me the 5 cents per box, and I'd divide it all up among the boys on the basis of how many they picked. We'd have a three-hour lab in orange-picking and Fred wasn't a very fast picker, but he was pretty thorough. So, at the end of these three hours, he'd picked five boxes, which is a rather poor rate.

Five boxes times a nickel is 25 cents so a couple of weeks later, when I was paying for the picking on that particular round and I'd call out the name and give them the money, Fred stood up and raised up his quarter and says "This is the first money I've ever earned in the United States of America," and everybody gave him a big hand.

We also had a Japanese boy in that class, Jiro Kai, and he was an Inspection major; one of Weir's students, but he was a nice kid except he was an inveterate gambler. He always had a poker game going; probably three nights a week, you could find Jiro and a group of boys playing poker.

We, in those early days, sort of policed—it was kind of crazy but we policed the dorms and saw that the kids were in and if—almost nobody got in trouble with the police because Mr. McPhee had that old rule that [said] the three things you couldn't do and stay in school; you couldn't get in trouble with the police, you couldn't steal, and you couldn't be drunk. He had made them stick

it at San Luis Obispo over all the years and we were supposed to make them stick down here. And pretty well, we did. I don't remember more than one or two boys being booted out in that whole first three or four years.

**DH:** [inaudible voice in the background]

**HH:** Spring at San Dimas was always a pleasant time, especially in March and April, as it is before the May and June fog set in all the time. The second year or the third year would either have been '39 or '40, we had a very energetic student on the campus by the name of [inaudible]. He was an Inspection major. I think he probably—his heritage was from Central Europe somewhere, second-generation. He was a very good student and also a leader. He didn't hold any student-body offices, but he was a great organizer.

One day, we were up in the office - Meacham and myself - waiting for the 8 o'clock classes to start. And here comes a whole string of cars driving off the campus, filled with fellas. They drove around the campus, waved at the office and headed on out down the hill and off the campus. Practically the whole student body, it was probably that year was 150, had gotten into the act and formed a ditch day.

Most high schools have a ditch day that's organized and where the students are actually permitted to ditch, but this was an unorganized ditch day; unorganized as far as the school was concerned, but quite organized as far as the students were concerned. I don't think there were six students left on the campus that day, and they all drove off and went to the beach.

So, we had a quick staff meeting to decide what to do and we decided that the proper thing to do was to go along with it. We went off and played golf for the day and had the complete holiday for both students and staff. I think Weir Feters was upset but Meacham went along with it, and I certainly went along with it. We had [inaudible] and [inaudible] there and they thought it was pretty funny too, so they went out and played golf at the old Pomona Valley, or the Pomona course, which is now a county course over there.

The next day, when school started up, the students were all there and nobody paid any attention; acted like nothing had happened the day before. That day was named [inaudible] day. Several years later, Art came back to Cal Poly at one of our reunions; only now, he had changed his name. His name was Art Tansy. T-a-n-s-y. And he had gotten into the junk business, especially after the war and had acquired a lot of money by buying used machinery, used bearings, used gears and whatnot, and reselling them. While he wasn't much of a success in Agricultural Inspection, he certainly became an economic success.

It was probably one of the best organized ditch days that any college ever had, with probably 90% participation than the whole affair. In looking back, I think we made the best decision in not deciding to get excited about it, but to go along with it. I don't remember how well we did in golf, but we all enjoyed that particular day off.

[Inaudible] working in the Inspection department was especially successful because he had taken, while he was at San Luis Obispo, had gone and taken the county test for quarantine

inspection, shipping point inspection, standardization inspection and so forth. [He] knew what was asked in the questions. So, we geared our courses; he had it in San Luis Obispo first and then when we moved down here, he adhered these courses to the exams.

**HH:** That first year, we had to all - like I said before - do a lot of different things and I was given the job of teaching standardization, which is the grades in standards for fruits and vegetables on the market. Most fruits and vegetables have a grade, which they have to meet, and there are certain standards that determine what these grades are.

One of the courses that I inherited was Fruits and Vegetables Standardization. I'd never taught the course before or knew anything about it, but I got to work and studied the code and study the different grades for the different produce. Then I set up laboratory trips where all of the class went into the market, well, part of the class went into the market in different mornings. I would take four or five at a time—whatever we could get in the car—leave Cal Poly at four in the morning, and drive the old road into Los Angeles and be down on the fruit and vegetable market at 5 o'clock; and walk around and look at the grades, talk to some of the inspectors that were on duty down there and they would show us different things to look at.

And we would—if it were tomato season, we'd look at tomatoes, celery, asparagus, and the various products. Lettuce, of course, had grades and standards and [we] learned something about it.

The old market there was really a rough area, and it was a lot of fun to the kids and it was fun for me too. We had great ol' philosophical talks while we were driving in and out. We'd get in there by 5am and watch the market 'till 7am and then by driving like [a] mad [man], we'd be back for 8 o'clock classes at San Dimas. The students, perhaps the mornings we were going in, they wouldn't necessarily have Standardization that morning; they maybe would have to get back for English, Math, or something else. So, it was important that we make the whole round trip.

One of the students that I had, of course, was "Red" Sperber, Herman Sperber down in Holtville. He was kind of a godfather to Cal Poly. And he had come from the valley and had worked in lettuce? down there and do something about that but didn't know a lot of the other commodities. So, we had a real, fine time on these trips. Sperber was a very... either high or low person. He was either on top of the world and everything was going great or he was way down in the depths and was about to check out of school and quit.

Lots of times on these trips when we were talking, he'd indicate that he was feeling low and I'd try to cheer him up and get him back on the high cycle. We became quite close friends during that period of time and then he went on to San Luis Obispo; graduated in the class of '42, which was the first degree-granting class.

I went to Imperial Valley and taught Agriculture for one year at Holtville High School and then he [Sperber] was picked up by a big farmer down there, K.K. Sharp, who made him a field man. He worked for K.K. for about five years, and was always going to be made a partner, and K.K. was kind of a slicker and never did. So, at the end of the five years, Sperber went to work for J.R.

Snyder, who was a big landowner down there and County Supervisor, and a real big shot in Imperial Valley in the Holtville area.

**HH:** Another man that worked for J.R. Snyder that year was Robert Hawk, who was good at mechanics. He was handling the mechanical part of things and Sperber was handling the growing end; they made quite a combination with J.R. Snyder for several years. Finally, later on, Bob Hawk quit and went to work for Joe Maggio, the big carrot king down there. He was a grower for Maggio for several years and during the years when vegetables made lots of money. Bob hung onto his money. Now here it is, thirty years later, and Bob Hawk and Herman Sperber are partners in farming down in Imperial Valley; both having started to work for J.R. Snyder in the early days.

This gets off from Cal Poly, but several of those early boys that went into the market with us later on went into that sort of work and became lifetime inspectors and agricultural commissioners. One is Ralph Lichte, who had graduated from Berkeley—I think about 1940—and had tried to take the commissioners' tests and couldn't pass them. So, he came out to Cal Poly in the fall of 1940 and took our standardization test, quarantine test, inspection courses and so forth. [He] just picked them up and took them as a regular student, although he already had his degree, and went through this year and took his exams the following year. And I remember one year in the quarantine test in L.A. county, why Cal Poly students were first, second and third. UCLA student got fourth; another Cal Poly student got fifth and then a Berkeley student got sixth.

So, they needed three people that year so the first three were the Cal Poly graduates that took the jobs. This was very impressive to the commissioners all over the state, and so they started to shoo head boys our way who were interested in commissioner work. And that's what built up the department to its zenith, prior to the time that Cal Poly closed down for the war.

Weir was very ambitious, as I've said before, and he worked very hard and he followed his students up very well. Anytime he could get them to come back and talk to the Inspection Club about the job itself and the things that would happen, he would do that and the courses kept them in contact with Cal Poly.

We tried to do the same thing in citrus inspection and citrus production, avocado production, nursery work, and so forth. It was very effective because in those days, jobs were very scarce and anybody that was really skilled and could show that skill and get a job was someone that was looked up to. There was more emphasis placed on success and getting a job than most of anything else that we did out there, because we felt that measured how well we were doing our jobs. If our kids couldn't pass the test and couldn't get the jobs, and other schools could, then that would make us feel pretty badly. But that never happened to us; we were really on top of the field.

I remember one summer, it was '39 that—of course, I was only on 10 months at first at Cal Poly; two months off in the summertime, I took a summertime job in Fullerton inspecting oranges. This was after 'Freeze year,' and I was assigned to the Fullerton area; I had eight packing houses



that I covered to check on whether they were keeping up their standards in oranges for shipment. About six of these packing houses were Sunkist houses; one was an independent and one was a Blue Goose.

**HH:** Most of the Sunkist houses tried real hard to keep their grade up. The independent house was kind of a shyster outfit; he'd always want me to tell him if the inspection was going right on the line. If they were allowed 15% frozen oranges, 20% of the surface of 15% of the oranges when cut could show frozen or drying. He always wanted me to tell him if we were running 12% frozen, why he wanted to get in more frozen fruit; he'd try to hug it right on the line. Once in a while, he'd go over and then I'd have to red tag the fruit. This would upset him quite a bit.

He was a Jewish gentleman—as many were in the produce business at that time and in fact still are—but as I look back on it, that was his operation. He wasn't trying to sell a number one product; he was trying to sell fruit and get all that the law would allow in as far as frozen was concerned. And he was upset when he got in too much and we red tagged him because it was expensive. Then he had to put the fruit back through the machinery and separate it again; and try to [inaudible] enough to get down to the legal requirement. This cost more money to rerun the fruit; that's probably what upset him the most.

I remember one experience down there; I went into this packing house of this particular firm and he was packing fruit under a label from Corona. Corona was up the Santa Ana Canyon in Riverside county. I wasn't too sure of the law, but I was pretty sure that you weren't supposed to use the label from an area that your fruit was coming from.

So, I called into the boss at Santa Ana, who was the senior inspector, and told him what was going on. He said, "You stop him right now," so I went out and told the man that he couldn't pack any more fruit under that label. He already had one car almost full, a whole freight car full of fruit under this Corona label. He really had a stroke; he shouted, swore, jumped up and down, and had a fit. I said, "Alright, come on in the office and we'll call the boss and let him tell you."

So, I went in, called the boss, and fortunately the boss backed me up. He told Herman Fink—that was his name. I just remembered it. He told Herman Fink that he knew better than that; he couldn't pack fruit from Fullerton under 'Corona' label. And of course, the reason for the law of that is that people buying at a distance think of Corona as 'good' fruit and they think of Fullerton as maybe 'less than good' fruit. So that is why the protection of the law was in there. I was real happy to be backed up on that inspection.

Also, at that time, we had a Sunkist inspector. They check a higher grade than the county and the county has a minimum requirement; a Sunkist packing house has a higher requirement. So, the Sunkist inspector was going around in the same houses that I was going around. He couldn't go in all the time, so he would go into a house, two or three houses in the morning, and look at the fruit and cut a sample and tell [write in] the packing form how it was going. And then he'd leave and go onto another house.

The Sunkist inspector was the first one that tipped me; he said there's one house in this group that as soon as you leave in the morning, they figure you're not gonna be back until afternoon so

they immediately start to run some doubtful fruit. So he taught me that if you went into a house in the morning, if you made a pattern—you'd go in house number one in the morning at nine, house number two at ten, and house number three at eleven—they would soon catch on to that. So, he taught me to mix it up; I'd go in to house number one at nine and then next time around, I'd come in to house number one at 11 o'clock and go into house number seven at eight in the morning and mix it up so that they couldn't determine the pattern.

**HH:** There was one house, the Randolph Packing Co. in Fullerton, that put up a very high grading fruit. They—when the fruit is washed in warm water, sometimes when the Valenicas [oranges] are tender, there'll be split ends on the blossom ends after it comes up on the water, especially if the water is hot. I got off the beam one day and was looking at these split ends and thought I had something worse than that. They were very kind to a really young inspector. They took me in the office and explained to me that I wasn't finding a lot of things that were bad - it was the hot water - and that I shouldn't really be concerned about it. What they could've done was really chew me out, jump on the bus, and so forth. But they jump on the bus on the count of me. They really took pains to show me what was wrong with my thinking on that particular thing.

I think in the inspection work, probably judgement in not getting excited was the best thing that you learned from that. I notice that the inspectors that have been inspectors for many years, and successful ones that the packing house people respected and also followed, because they knew that they were trying to help them sell as good a grade of fruit they could. If the fruit was bad that particular year due to frost or crystallization, it was up to everybody to help move the crop; it wasn't a police-state type of thing, where you stop all the wheels, because the growers needed to salvage what they could out of the crop.

The packing house needed to pack as much as they could. On the other hand, the standardization inspection was to protect the customer from getting too dry a fruit or too poor a fruit, so he wasn't getting his money's worth. I think it's a little bit like young policemen that you see now, young policemen that go on-duty. [He] thinks he has to really throw the book around and wave his badge and so forth; quite often, he'll get much further if he just calmly explains things and doesn't be too ticket-happy to start with.

[Henry?], I seem to have run out of ideas on the olden days at Cal Poly Voorhis but I think I have a suggestion that might be good if you want to follow through on it. There is to be a homecoming for the Voorhis people sometime this fall; I'd forgotten the date. If this has a good turnout, and I know that my son-in-law, Winton Ashton, plans to be there and many other of the old Voorhis students [too].

It might be helpful in your historic remembrances if you would provide this tape recorder or some other one at that meeting, and perhaps you would get some real good ideas from some of the former students that could add to your historic input.

I'm going to close off now and hope this has been of some help to you. Some of the conversations you'll hear on this will be from my wife Dorothea, who was up there in the early days and she didn't feel very proud of what she had contributed but it is something.

Perhaps, this will be of some help. I do think that if you do bring the tape recorder to the Voorhis reunion, or have someone bring it there, this might help out quite a lot. Okay? This is Howard Hawkins signing off.

*End of interview*

## Index

	<u>Page Number</u>
Ashton, Winton	15
Balch, Bob	2, 4
Baseball	2
Blue Goose	13
Clewett, Heber	2, 4
Court, Mrs. W.E.	8
Ditch Day	10
Fetters, Weir	8-9, 11, 13
Fetters, Weir, Mrs.	8
Fink, Herman	13-14
Gray, Mrs. Stanton	8
Hawk, Robert	12
Hawkins, Pat and Jacqueline	4
Kai, Jiro	10
Leech, William	3
Lichte, Ralph	12
Los Angeles Produce Market	11-12
Maggio, Joe	12
Meachum, Vernon	1, 4, 8, 11
Meachum, Vernon, Mrs.	8
McPhee, Julian	1, 4

	<u>Page Number</u>
Pearl Harbor	7
Placentia	9
Poly Vue	5-6
Randolph Packing Company	14
Sharp, K.K.	12
Sperber, Herman “Red”	12
Snyder, J.R.	12
Sunkist	13-14
Tansy, Art	11
Troutner, William	2
Voorhis, Charles	1
Voorhis, Ella	1
Voorhis, Jerry	1, 4